

CSPL Employee Spotlight

November 2024



Kate McKenzie

Development Director, NPR Illinois



We are pleased to spotlight Kate McKenzie for her dedication and work with NPR Illinois and UIS. Kate has worked in the Division of Advancement since late 2019, where she did marketing and communication work before becoming the Development Director for NPR Illinois in 2022. In this role, Kate is responsible for development strategy and implementation. Her work involves building relationships with supporters to encourage giving through philanthropy and gift planning.

Kate earned a Masters degree in Public Affairs Reporting from UIS and a Bachelors in Mass Communication-Journalism from Winona State University. Before joining UIS, Kate spent more than 16 years as a journalist working for newspapers across the Midwest. Her beats as a reporter and editor included K-12 education, higher education, and government and courts. This extensive journalism background makes Kate a fantastic fit for a vital position at NPR Illinois, and we're glad to have her on our team!

What do you like most about your job or what motivates you to wake up and go to work? I love knowing that we provide a vital service to our community. People need unbiased, accurate news from a source they trust. Our donors support our work because NPR Illinois is that source. And our donors are AMAZING. Truly some of the most inspirational people I've ever met. They give because they care not only about themselves being informed, but ensuring our entire region is informed.

What drew you to your current position? I like that it combined the two areas I had previously worked in - journalism and fundraising - into one job. While I'm not the one reporting the stories, I raise money to support those who are. We need that now more than ever.

What has been your favorite project thus far? The station needed a new cable for one of its broadcasting towers in spring 2023, at a cost of more than \$50,000. We raised it in less than a month. It's what made me start saying, "Together, we are NPR Illinois." Because yes, the staff reports the news and does amazing storytelling and does all the behind-the-scenes work for that to come out of your radio dial (or streaming service), but it's all possible because of the donors. Together, we make what you hear at 91.9 WUIS and 89.3 WIPA possible.

If you could learn to do anything, what would it be? I think it would be fun to refinish furniture that you find at garage sales/thrift shops and flip it. But power tools are usually not my friend.

What do you like to do when you are not working? Spend time with my family, including my husband Tim, son Ben, and stepsons Max and Truman. They make my life complete.

What is something you learned just in the last week? We had my 3 year old son's first parent-teacher conference for preschool last week and we learned that his teacher counts on him to be a friend to all of his classmates because he is kind to everyone. It was a proud mama moment!

If you could choose anyone, who would you pick as your mentor? Katharine Graham, who was the publisher of *The Washington Post* during their reporting on Watergate. She was tenacious and stood up to the powers that be to defend the freedom of the press.

What's a fun fact about you many people may not know? I love watching *Star Wars* movies and shows.

What is your motto or personal mantra? To be kind and leave any place I've been better than before, as best summed up by Dr. Seuss: "Be sure when you step, step with care and great tact. And remember that life's a Great Balancing Act."

Any favorite line from a movie? "Do or do not. There is no try."